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ABSTRACT

This document is designed to help British training and enterprise councils (TECs) and further education (FE) colleges develop and implement strategies for achieving the National Targets for Education and Training (NTET), which were developed by the Confederation of British Industry in 1992 and endorsed by the British government. The findings from case studies of 14 FE colleges are synthesized, and guidelines for achieving the NTET are presented. The document includes sections on the following topics: (1) increasing participation (helping learners participate, management information systems, student support services, collaboration, messages); (2) retention and dropout (why students leave courses early, strategies for minimizing dropping out, problems to recognize and overcome, recommendations); (3) enhancing basic skills support (enhancement of basic skills and the relationship to the NTET, definition of basic skills, aims and rationale, changing models, differentiated support, staff development, progress, recommendations; (4) supporting industry (investigating the training levels and needs of specific industries, delivering training and development to small firms, promoting National Vocational Qualifications to small- and medium-sized enterprises); (5) developing self-reliance, flexibility, and breadth (auditing curricula for breadth); and (6) conclusions (strategic implications, collaboration, benefits to colleges). Appended are the original NTET and an updated set of targets. (MN)

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TACKLING TARGETS

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TACKLING TARGETS

Further Education Unit
Citadel Place
Tinworth Street
London SE11 5EH

Tel: 0171-962 1280
Fax: 0171-962 1266

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CONTENTS

Introduction 3

Increasing participation 5

Retention and drop-out 9

Enhancing basic skills support 10

Supporting industry 12

Developing self-reliance, flexibility and breadth 13

Conclusions 19

Acknowledgements 21

Appendix A — National Targets for Education and Training 22

Appendix B — An Updated Set of Targets 28

INTRODUCTION

What are National Targets for Education and Training?

Following the publication by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) of *Towards a Skills Revolution* (1989), the CBI subsequently set out targets for education and training in *World Class Targets* (1992). These targets, now known as the National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs), are supported and endorsed by the Government.

The Targets are concerned with raising skills levels and, equally importantly, encouraging lifelong learning, in order to improve Britain's competitiveness. They seek to make training and education a priority for all individuals and organisations. The National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets (NACETT) is reviewing the Targets to update and amend them, having consulted interested parties during the summer and autumn of 1994.[1] Regular amendments are likely to be necessary to ensure that the Targets keep pace with the skill levels required in a rapidly changing world.

Meeting the Targets

In publishing the Targets, it was acknowledged that mechanisms to bring about their achievement had not been constructed. It is also clear that achieving the Targets will require the active collaboration of the various partners including employers, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and colleges. For this purpose, TECs have been charged with establishing strategic forums which bring together the key players to agree and implement strategies for achieving Targets locally.

The Further Education Unit (FEU) and the Employment Department (ED) initiated a development project in January 1993 which was designed to:

- identify the strategic implications for colleges of NTETs;
- provide case studies which demonstrated strategies for achieving Targets, including collaborative mechanisms.

In phase one of this work, 14 colleges of further education (FE) were asked to examine the path that they would take toward the Targets by identifying relevant key events and activities, and facilitating and inhibiting factors. This work took place at a time when TECs were attempting to establish local baselines from which to measure progress toward the achievement of the Targets and to set local targets. The conclusions from phase one were published in *Meeting National Targets for Education and Training in Colleges* (FEU, 1994).

The second phase of the project involved the same colleges undertaking development work to promote the achievement of one or more of the Targets.

Tackling Targets draws upon case studies, resulting from this development work, which:

- provide illustrations of activity leading toward the achievement of NTETs;
- set out messages for colleges, TECs and national bodies.

This publication will be of considerable interest to senior managers in TECs and colleges, to the Employment Department to the Further Education Funding Councils (FEFCs) and to NACETT.

1 Since this project was initiated, amendments to the original targets have been proposed. This work was based on the targets in Appendix A. The proposed revised targets are also included as Appendix B.

The participating colleges made considerable progress in a relatively short time and all concerned would stress that this is merely part of a continuing commitment to increasing participation and achievement, which lie at the heart of the Targets. Whatever the form and content of NTETs, FE colleges have a significant role in their achievement and in the development of a high skills and knowledge base.

A number of common themes emerged from the case studies and each chapter of this publication addresses one of these themes.

Maria Hughes and **Gordon Holding**
Development Officers

INCREASING PARTICIPATION

The increased participation required by NTETs depends upon reaching identified non-participating groups and adjusting the college offer to accommodate the particular circumstances of these groups.

Helping learners to participate

Colleges must become more flexible in order to promote wider participation. In particular, change is necessary if learners are to be supported in the crucial first stage of re-entry to education and training.

In some cases, a proactive approach with collaborating agencies may be required. A number of young people disappear from statistics between leaving school and registering as unemployed two years later, usually because they do not reply to letters from the careers services or don't attend any of the offered careers interviews. To investigate the reasons for this, High Peak College persuaded community workers to allow interviews to be recorded with young people in youth clubs in the college's catchment area. The transcripts of the interviews reveal a high degree of alienation from education and training, with negative experiences of school, employment and training schemes, and the support offered by a range of agencies: '...you see they gave up hope on me early...'

Stockton and Billingham College noted the wide range of additional activity necessary to attract adult returners. The college found that the majority of new adult participants joining learning programmes would recommend their programme to others, and were interested in progressing to further programmes. In contrast, non-participating school leavers interviewed by High Peak College were not fully aware of what was on offer or prepared to find out.

Stockton and Billingham College built upon two existing City Challenge initiatives ('Fresh Start' and 'First Step') designed for non-participating adults by:

- developing routes into the college to ensure that participation in certificated learning programmes provides a crucial 'first step' toward nationally recognised qualifications;
- promoting individual learner portfolios containing an action plan, a record of achievement and possible progression routes.

The college aimed to address Lifetime Learning Targets 2 and 3 and also Foundation Learning Target 4 by developing progression routes from uncertificated or adult learning to nationally recognised qualifications. At the same time, the college aimed to help the learner 'to develop self- reliance, flexibility and breadth' (Foundation Target 4).

None of this is possible unless appropriate programmes are available for potential learners and pathways to, through and between programmes are well-defined and take account of a unitised curriculum. This requires an action plan for learners linked to the identification of appropriate units of NVQs learners could achieve while attending a particular programme of study.

Management information systems

Assessing the extent to which the achievement of Targets from increased participation is successful, depends on upgrading management information systems (MIS). At Stockton and Billingham this was seen as vital in tracking learners' progression, achievement and destination, and in developing processes for the construction and review of individual learner action/learning plans.

The college reported that the role of MIS was the most complicated part of the project: sections of the college had developed their own MIS solutions resulting in unnecessary duplication of information and lack of compatibility. It was observed: 'New planned systems would take some time to meet needs and remove duplication of effort; examination of systems in use elsewhere only served to highlight our current problems.'

North Lincolnshire College, as part of its introduction of a modular curriculum, noted that: 'a student tracking system is vital to monitoring and evaluating progress and carrying out formative and summative feedback to students and other clients such as training providers. Progress along negotiated pathways can be mapped and action plans updated and developed.'

The college had identified the need for software to record individual pathways and accompanying achievements. However, it noted that FEFC recognised that such developments are at least 12 months away and set out to produce a paper-based system to provide a comprehensive set of records at entry, on-programme and exit stages of learning.

The college reports indicate that appropriate computerised MIS, accessible to curriculum staff as well as college managers, are needed (urgently in some cases) to deal with the increased flexibility in programmes and patterns of learning implied by increased participation, but also to cope with new funding mechanisms and other requirements of the Funding Councils.

Student support services

Support services need to be appropriately resourced and provided in a suitable environment to match the culture of potential learners. They should be seen as a vital mechanism to start the processes of participation and maintain the progress of learners.

Stockton and Billingham College recognised the growth of student support services as vital to increased participation. The college's attempt to provide educational guidance and action planning for traditionally non-participating adults on an outreach basis has proved to be a successful strategy in increasing participation. Information, advice and guidance sessions were offered to adults at a number of locations in the community, in collaboration with other agencies involved (employment services, community centres, an advice centre, an open prison).

Of the 297 adults interviewed, 75 enrolled on programmes at the college or at outreach centres in collaboration with a large number of voluntary and other agencies in the community. Of the 75, 32% have progressed to other learning programmes in and outside the college. The college noted the importance of these developments but also that 'outreach work is very time consuming both in the development of a community provision and in the co-ordination of the work involved'. A helpful but unplanned related outcome has been support for a community education forum providing a network for agencies involved.

An associated questionnaire to the learners who enrolled revealed that the largest proportion of them ascribed their decision to enrol to the influence of pre-entry guidance. The overwhelming majority felt they were on the correct learning programme for their needs, although nearly half felt they were not stretched enough by it.

Access to high-quality advice and guidance is clearly a significant factor in increasing participation. Northampton College found that as a result of having an interview with the college advice and guidance unit, most enrolled on full- or part-time programmes.

Northampton College is a member of a county-wide guidance, advice and information network (GAIN). This TEC-supported initiative began operation early in 1994 and included a major programme of associated staff development (e.g. toward Training and Development Lead Body Assessor awards), following a mapping and evaluation of existing guidance services. Detailed planning preceded the establishment of the network to which the college made a significant contribution. The availability of guidance vouchers has enabled more people to gain access to this provision. Early perceptions are that this is proving to be a success and further development is being planned.

At North Lincolnshire College 'diagnostic assessment is central to the college's aim to ensure student placement and successful development along individual learning pathways leading to viable vocational outcomes'.

The college's contacts with other agencies and the examination of published research confirmed the benefits of adequate guidance linked to assessment for individuals and institutions. It set out to map the resources which might be deployed in assessment and guidance and produced a draft model for diagnostic assessment encompassing:

- a guidance interview;
- options review meetings;
- diagnostic testing procedures (linking to a course tutor and other agencies as necessary);
- an individual action plan;
- a record of achievement.

The college recognised the need 'to decide the appropriate balance between a centralised specialist guidance service and delivery of guidance by each tutor/lecturer at the point of learning'.

This would require a consideration of the resource implications of training more members of staff (or even simply making them aware of the whole college curriculum offer) and of offering detailed assessment to all incoming students given that an estimated 80% of students were felt to be relatively focused on their choice of learning programme. North Lincolnshire College has initiated a related staff development programme for all tutors and specialist training for some.

Collaboration

Achievement of National Targets by increased participation requires that colleges should co-operate with other agencies which are identified as appropriate partners in the processes. A collaborative approach which maximises the use of these joint resources may be the best local strategy to further increase participation.

In collaboration with a local school, Walsall College of Arts and Technology set out to investigate the potential client groups for Foundation and Lifetime Learning in the catchment area of the school and, among other aims, to examine how a collaborative offer might best meet the needs of these client groups. Staff in both institutions felt that GNVQs potentially offered opportunities for collaboration, despite organisational difficulties and some mutual ignorance and suspicion. For example, it was felt that although 14-19 education should create a positive attitude toward lifetime learning and returning, the reality was different. Apart from students who became 'drifters' (and the college felt more research was needed into why some of this group do later return), those who are more focused had 'milestones' which, for some, could also be drop-out points (see also **Retention and Drop-out**). Answers to the problem for both categories might include more personal development programmes and enhanced use of records of achievement and the use of careership programmes (which High Peak College also identified as a possible source of progress).

Such programmes are being undertaken in other areas, for example, a careership programme in the engineering field has been initiated by Dudley College and is currently being developed by that college with the support of Dudley TEC, other colleges in the Dudley area, local schools, and University of Wolverhampton.

Collaboration to improve on the generally low adult participation in school programmes seemed potentially fruitful. A number of recommendations for local research, specific activities, and joint working parties were developed in the Walsall project. These build on existing collaborative activity which includes a 'Saturday college' on the school site with a range of programmes for children and adults, college staff teaching on some programmes at the school, and an agreement that school evening programme students should visit the college toward the end of a year to encourage study at the next level.

Stockton and Billingham College emphasised collaboration with other organisations, including TECs, as part of the work to achieve targets and noted that 'since commencing the FEU project our relationships with other agencies have strengthened'.

Northampton College, noting the role of guidance in relation to a voucher scheme and the relationship between 'referral' and 'redeeming' agencies, reports that 'where there has been regular consultation between the two organisations at an operational level then a far greater level of understanding and appreciation of the service exists'.

High Peak College plans to consult with its TEC and the careers service to develop a strategy for new approaches to young people and programmes on offer, their promotion and delivery. Appropriate action might include more formal links with other agencies, an improved flow of information to final-year school students, flexible routes back into the system, and improved advice and guidance for early leavers from programmes.

Messages

- Colleges need to adjust their curriculum offer and its delivery to promote wider achievement.
- Pro-active and collaborative approaches with other agencies — such as the Careers Service, youth services or community groups — are effective in reaching learners who are either disenchanted with education or apprehensive about participating in formal learning.
- MIS are essential to the efficient tracking of learners' achievements, progression and destinations — particularly within a unitised curriculum framework — to assist learners movement in and out of formal learning opportunities.
- Access to high-quality advice and guidance is a significant factor in increasing participation.
- A strategic approach to increasing participation is required, preferably through local partnerships, which allocates resources to the promotion of guidance and/or programmes to defined target groups.

RETENTION AND DROP OUT

The work of colleges in this project emphasised that learners must be motivated to achieve and encouraged to continue learning. Individual learners must feel that what they have achieved is valued and recognised by employers and FE and higher education (HE) providers. Similarly, learners must be encouraged to achieve beyond their current expectations, which may be unrealistically low.

In addition to the stimulus of NTETs, reports on wastage such as *Unfinished Business* (OFSTED/Audit Commission, 1993), the funding methodology and the inspection processes of the FEFCs are external pressures encouraging colleges to give attention to retaining students and supporting their successful progression. FEFC funding methodology requires colleges to track student achievement on an individual basis and to monitor retention rates.

A deliberate strategy toward achieving NTETS explored by two colleges, and of interest more widely, is to minimise drop-out, to enhance retention and to ensure that students receive credit toward qualifications even if circumstances cause them to discontinue their studies.

West Suffolk College chose to identify the reasons why students were leaving courses early and to determine action necessary to reduce the number of drop-outs. This action would form part of the college's quality assurance process. It was anticipated that additional advice, guidance and support would be needed with a view to enabling premature leavers to either change to a more appropriate course or training place, or return to education and training at a later date.

Wirral Metropolitan College set up an early leavers' service to:

- ensure recognition and/or partial certification of achievement;
- provide a service for those students who would not otherwise receive recognition of their achievements;
- evaluate the effects of the service.

Associated with this, the quality unit at Wirral College is testing a system of monitoring students' attendance patterns and achievement, to discover why students leave before completing programmes.

Other colleges are also developing mechanisms to support students who might otherwise have difficulties in sustaining their learning. At Woolwich College, disadvantaged young people are being matched with mentors in local business to support them in their learning and so achieve the college's policy of increasing student completion and achievement, as well as retention. The mentors, who are successful men and women from similar backgrounds to the students, receive a training and induction programme.

Why do students leave their courses early?

Many research studies have been undertaken to determine reasons for early leaving.[1] Reasons for individual drop-out may appear to be relatively simple, but more often comprise a mixture of social, psychological and course-related factors.

West Suffolk College, in its sample of full-time courses in this project, categorised reasons for students leaving without completing the course as follows:

	expressed as % of total students	
started a job	2.9	
personal or other reasons	1.9	
course no longer related to plan	1.0	} course-related reasons
course too hard	0.7	
took on too much	0.4	
disliked course content	0.4	
misunderstood nature of course	0.3	
financial	0.6	
moved from area	0.6	
other reasons	0.2	
unknown	1.6	
TOTAL	**10.6%**	

Clearly, gaining employment is the most significant reason for non-completion in this particular example. This indicates the need to explore with both students and their employers how work and continuing education and training can be combined.

Drop-out for reasons which are in some way to do with the course provision and which may be within a college's influence and control, appear to be similar in magnitude to those which are job-start related. Colleges may therefore wish to examine closely their advice and guidance systems, and the content and delivery of their learning programme to assess the extent to which these are supportive of all learners.

Financial difficulties do not seem to be the major reasons for dropping out at West Suffolk, although there are indications that they may actually be more significant than they appear: for example, a learner may be leaving a course to get a job because of financial difficulties, rather than having any genuine choice between the two. At Wirral College, financial barriers were especially identified as reasons for discontinuing study. However, finding themselves on an inappropriate programme was also identified by learners as a significant factor.

In many cases, staff perceived that students did not lack motivation or commitment, but rather a set of other factors beyond the control of the learner prevented them from completing their course. Wirral College has provided specialist advice and guidance to give support and encouragement to students to continue their studies albeit at a later date, and to establish good communications between students and tutors.

How to minimise drop-out

West Suffolk College monitored the attendance of full-time students. Within a week of identifying a potential leaver, group tutors completed and sent a form about the student to the management information unit. Potential leavers were then invited to an exit interview with the co-ordinator of student support services. Tutors also gave time to supporting these students, and by early referral, developed a pro-active approach to problems and difficulties. The management information unit provided information every two weeks on the number of reasons for withdrawals. The process allowed a monthly comparison of this data.

1. The FEU Newsletter of Spring 1994 provides a useful summary of these factors.

In order to provide coherent and high-quality threshold learner services, Wirral College has established development centres at its main sites. These bring together the college advisory service for students' admissions, careers education and guidance, initial assessment of core skills and core skills, action planning, APL guidance, the student finance service and college registration. The college has set up an early leavers' service. This employs 'retention clerks' to support teaching staff in maintaining close information about students and their progress.

Any student absent without explanation on two or more consecutive occasions will receive a letter from the college's quality assurance unit, advising them of the college's student support services, and asking them to make contact. A second letter is sent within six weeks to students not responding to the first letter. If there is still no response, then the student's enrolment is cancelled, but a further letter is sent inviting the student to attend a free interview with development centre staff to review and accredit or record their achievements to date and to think about their progression. The student's tutors provide relevant information before the interview about the student's achievements or record of work. Tutors are also asked to give additional comments which may be helpful, especially if there are exceptional circumstances for the student's absence.

An innovative feature of the Wirral development is the review of student achievement, with a view to students gaining credit or a record of their achievement within the college's unitised 'learning framework'. It is anticipated that accreditation of part achievement of a programme, for example, a part of a GNVQ/NVQ unit, will encourage a student to return at a later date, and so contribute in the longer term to the achievement of NTETS.

Other tactics to minimise drop-out employed by colleges include:

- pre-entry advice and guidance which is consistent, and includes diagnostic tests to support those with non-standard entry qualifications
- the evaluation of the setting of entry requirements for courses;
- recording and valuing students' individual achievement;
- breaking down curriculum areas into smaller units to provide more 'easy steps' to learning;
- 'on-course' and 'exit' guidance in conjunction with other providers such as GAIN (see p.9) — TECs, careers libraries, employment services and the educational services provided by other colleges;
- college-wide systems of identifying students' difficulties, assessing their basic skills needs and requirements for learning support.

Problems to recognise and overcome

- The delay after the initial identification of a leaver can be critical. Communication between the tutor and the central monitoring and support service must be simple, quick and efficient.
- Competing pressures on staff may result in their attention to drop-out not being a priority. Awareness of the importance of successful completion must be raised across the college.
- As students often do not readily inform tutors of their intention to withdraw, efficient monitoring systems must be implemented to identify potential early learners.
- Resources required to check registers and interview students must be provided.
- While it may be impracticable to interview all potential early leavers, the college must have a clear policy and procedure which ensures consistency and equity in this process.

Messages

- Pre-course guidance material and the admissions and interviewing processes should be examined critically to ensure that sufficient opportunity for discussion and induction are provided to ensure that students choose a course which is right for them.
- Regular and frequent collection of data enables the extent of drop-out to be monitored and reasons for withdrawal acted upon.
- Instant telephone responses and confidential interview areas are extremely important.
- Colleges should explore means by which financial support for students may be secured in the short and medium term.
- A robust MIS is essential for checking attendance, absence and achievement, with personal access for each staff member to the network.
- Tutors are key people in communicating with students. This responsibility needs to be acknowledged and resourced.
- Many students appreciate college initiatives to provide support to prevent them dropping out or to accredit partial achievement. Such students may well continue with their studies at a later date.
- Students need opportunities to review and monitor their progress to maintain their motivation and understand the value of their learning. A climate of life-long learning which encourages individuals to become 'lifetime returners', may thus be built on the principles of progression.
- The role of clerical support staff in monitoring student progress enables accurate information to be obtained.
- Staff development of tutors and all personnel involved in customer care skills is required.
- It is important to recognise that stages which are milestones to further progression for some students (e.g. completion of Key Stage 4, GNVQ Intermediate) are drop-out or 'quit' points for students who are seen (or see themselves) as non-achievers.
- The balance of resource use between retaining enrolled students and attracting new students needs to be decided at senior management level and made known and accepted by all concerned.

ENHANCING BASIC SKILLS SUPPORT

Basic skills are assuming a greater importance as NTETs and colleges' recruitment targets lead to participation by a wider range of learners with different levels of achievement and interest. The increasing sophistication of labour market demands requires workers to be competent at a higher level of basic skills to cope with jobs at technician level or above.

Colleges are not only required to increase the numbers participating in FE, but are rewarded on their students' achievements. Demands for more and higher levels of knowledge and skills and the resulting emphasis on progression should lead to people attempting courses and qualifications at a higher level. Ensuring that students make informed and appropriate decisions about their learning goals and that they are supported in achieving them has become a priority.

Enhancement of basic skills and the relationship to NTETS

Competence in basic skills is vital to achieve the level of qualifications demanded by the Targets. The assumption that this will always be achieved during compulsory education is false: there will always be children and young people who under-perform at school for all sorts of reasons. FE must provide support in order to enable such learners to succeed post-16.

Equally, the need for such support is not confined to school leavers. Many adults also lack basic skills, despite having the ability to successfully undertake a variety of roles. Adult returners may need extra support, particularly in the early stages of their learning programme.

Basic skills requirements differ according to the context and content of particular learning opportunities. Some learners may need quite specific support in a particular area, such as numeracy, to cope with, for example, the mathematical requirements of a course in sociology.

Two colleges, North Lindsey and South Tyneside, considered the extent to which basic skills support brought about greater achievement and completion and therefore contributed to the attainment of NTETS.

North Lindsey College wanted to enhance its basic skills support, '...primarily to address Foundation Target 1 by enabling a greater number of students to achieve NVQ 2...experience has shown that students at all levels of study need help with basic skills. Therefore there may be some impact on Foundation Target 3. Foundation Target 4 is also addressed through supporting students to develop self reliance, flexibility and breadth.'

South Tyneside College aimed to, '...contribute to the achievement of the local and national targets...by developing cross college basic skills support...' and observed that NTETS gave basic skills support an added impetus.

North Lindsey College noted: 'As a provider, we were becoming increasingly aware of a new client group. School leavers who traditionally had left school at 16 years of age and gone straight into manual jobs or Youth Training were finding these places much harder to get. They were disadvantaged by poor reading, writing and number skills and had left school with very low attainment in GCSE.'

Definition of basic skills

Because of increasingly sophisticated demands, basic skills support must extend beyond the development of reading, writing and number skills to the ability to use skills in the acquisition and application of knowledge. This support, therefore, needs to be closely related to the knowledge content of their main learning programme.

South Tyneside commented on the confusion over the definition of basic skills and the need to distinguish between:

- basic skills and specific learning difficulties;
- basic skills and core skills;
- literacy and English, numeracy and maths.

Aims and rationale

The aims and rationale for the development of enhanced basic skills support were similar in both colleges and each included some reference to local TEC priorities. South Tyneside aimed to 'contribute to the achievement of the local and national targets for education and training by developing cross-college basic skills support in order to respond to cross college basic skills needs', and noted that the college's strategic plan and Tyneside TEC's action plans recognise the need to encourage wider participation in education and training.

North Lindsey aimed to 'provide advice and support to teaching and support staff so as to embed learning support activities in the curriculum where required, to enhance the development of this work to ensure its continuity', and observed that explicit reference to NTETS was included in its strategic plan: 'the college will play an active part in helping to achieve the National Education and Training Targets'.

The colleges also shared a similar desire to move from discrete to integrated provision and both used the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit's (ALBSU) screening test with a significant number of students at the entry phase of learning programmes.

South Tyneside attributed the decision to develop the college's basic skills provision to several factors:

- focus on widening participation;
- efforts to increase successful completion;
- curriculum developments, particularly NVQ and GNVQ;
- development of more flexible methods of delivering the curriculum;
- support from senior management;
- demand from staff across the college;
- the results of its ALBSU consultancy review.

Changing models

The colleges saw the need to develop a more systematic approach to the provision of support for basic skills development. If this provision is accepted as a necessary entitlement to enable learners to achieve better, faster, and at a higher level, a planned and systematic approach to identifying and meeting needs is required with adequate levels of resourcing.

North Lindsey noted, 'Further education and training must be adjusted to meet the needs of all those who can benefit from it. This places a duty on us to adjust our focus and our teaching methodologies. It also challenges the funders of this provision to ensure that we can make the adjustments in order to produce the outcomes we all wish to see.'

South Tyneside observed, '...recent changes in the funding of basic skills have been helpful in maintaining the impetus...of the project'.

As the concepts of inclusivity and integration become more important in colleges, the need for discrete, bolt-on approaches to basic skills support is questioned. Both colleges wished to promote a holistic approach to basic skills provision. Equally, they took a strategic approach by establishing a picture of their current provision and prioritising developments. In both

cases the colleges identified weaknesses in their current practice, particularly in terms of fragmentation, inappropriate materials and the prevalent ethos which stressed students' deficiency rather than their entitlement to support. In particular:

'The location of the workshop...makes it somewhat "hidden" from potential users.'

'...there is an additional need for greater availability of resources at a more basic level than exists currently.'

'There should be greater contact with ESOL staff who operate from a teaching room in the same building, which houses the ESOL resource material available to the college.'

'Some sharing of resources with staff in the Basic Skills Unit would be advisable.'

South Tyneside college's action plan contained the following key elements:

- establish appropriate basic skills screening for all Business and Technology Education Council First Award or equivalent students;
- develop a model of support for basic skills, appropriate to identified needs;
- provide support for key staff involved in the delivery of BTEC First or equivalent courses.

Implementing this plan involved a team of staff, drawn from across the college including basic skills specialists and vocational staff working closely together, in exploring effective ways of delivering basic skills support to students in a vocational context. All teaching staff were asked to provide information relating to their experience and training in basic skills work, their willingness to participate in staff development and their perceptions of the need for basic skills support. The results of this audit revealed that there was a perceived need for basic skills support in a number of areas, with BTEC First and some craft level courses identified as a priority.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for staff development in this area, since many felt ill-equipped to deal with the basic skills needs of their students. Some staff had a little relevant experience, and only a few had any formal qualifications in basic skills or specialist teaching experience. Staff were concerned that current developments, particularly the introduction of GNVQ, would add to the demands placed upon the basic skills abilities of some of their students and that they might require extra support in order to succeed.

Before the project, the system of identifying students with basic skills difficulties at North Lindsey College relied on lecturers referring students to the supported learning manager, who undertook an initial assessment interview. This did not always result in early identification and securing support at the optimum time.

The college considered that to be effective, a screening programme was required during students' induction. By so doing, the college would obtain a complete picture of the need for support — at the level of individuals and programme area. This would allow the targeting of resources where they were most needed and inform planning of new or modified provision. Effective liaison between departments and learning support staff could also be managed more fruitfully.

Basic skills support had focused on the needs of individuals, but had not addressed institutions' needs. A more systematic approach was required. The old system provided too few opportunities for students to access extra support. The college was strong on diagnostic assessment but not as effective at meeting needs and providing access to appropriate accreditation. The awareness raising (of staff and students) resulting from initial screening needed to be sustained by follow-up action.

Awareness-raising sessions were held for all staff to sell the initiative and emphasise the benefits of the exercise to the whole college. Many staff were aware of the need to support students with more obvious learning difficulties but were less aware of the needs of students who have practical and verbal skills but find the assimilation and demonstration of knowledge difficult. It was apparent that many vocational lecturers had low expectations of such students. Demonstrating the successes of students who had progressed when given basic skills support was important. Lecturers may thus be more receptive to intervention by specialists and even consider ways of adjusting their teaching to better suit the learning needs of their students.

North Lindsey undertook a screening exercise in five of the college's departments, using the ALBSU tests, the results of which were mapped against the GNVQ core skills units.

ALBSU Standards	National Curriculum	GNVQ Core Skills
Communication	*English*	*Communication skills*
Foundation	Levels 2&3	Level 1
Stage 1	Levels 4&5	Levels 1&2
Stage 2	Levels 5, 6, 7	Levels 2&3
Stage 3	Levels 7, 8, 9	Levels 3&4
Numeracy	*Mathematics*	*Numeracy skills*
Foundation	Levels 3&4	Level 1
Stage 1	Levels 3, 4, 5, 6	Levels 1&2
Stage 2	Levels 4, 5, 6, 7	Levels 2&3

Source: *Basic Skills Support in Colleges — Assessing the need* (ALBSU, 1993)

As well as differences in terminology, there may be underlying differences in the definitions of these skills. The mapping is therefore a rule of thumb measure rather than an accurate correlation.

Results from the screening indicated that at North Lindsey 21% of students were operating at or below ALBSU's Level 1 in reading and 70% below this level in numeracy (952 students were screened). In the case of South Tyneside, the number of students requiring support (i.e. below Level 1) was 30% in reading and 54% in numeracy. The national average for a comparable sample would be 42% for reading and 61.5% for numeracy.

Differentiated support

Both colleges emphasised that screening is merely the beginning of assessment of needs. A range of provision and set of strategies is clearly required to obtain more specific information on requirements for basic skills support and on its implementation.

North Lindsey found that although resourcing support for all students who were at ALBSU's Level 1 and below was not possible, those with the greatest need were identified by the assessment process. Screening was followed by consultation with the course tutor to discuss students at risk of failing to meet their primary learning targets through lack of basic skills and referring such students further diagnostic assessment as necessary.

The results of these assessments informed an individual study support plan, which is the result of negotiation between the student and a member of the supported learning team. Formal reviews of progress were built into the process.

At South Tyneside support was differentiated according to the student's level of basic skills and based on the ALBSU screening test. This included:

- on-course support and basic skills sessions/workshops for students functioning at Foundation/Stage 1 in basic skills;
- most support provided by vocational lecturers with some supported work in workshops for students functioning at Stage 2;
- most support from vocational lecturers with self study in workshops for students functioning at Stage 3.

South Tyneside observed that, wherever possible, the learning activities of students attending workshops should reflect the vocational or academic characteristics of their main programme to demonstrate the relevance of the sessions as well as reinforcing the learning taking place within other studies. North Lindsey also emphasised the need to secure the active and continued involvement of vocational staff. A vocational course checklist was sent out to all course tutors so that the supported learning team would continue to be aware of course requirements. Regular personal contact was maintained with individual course tutors who provided extra course details, text books, worksheets and past examination papers, and other information.

Staff development

In both colleges staff development was seen as essential to ensure that basic skills support is effective. In response to demand, all staff at North Lindsey — including support staff — are to be invited to attend a series of seven half-day sessions on support for students who have difficulties with basic skills. At South Tyneside staff development has taken place in the following contexts:

- informal awareness raising;
- formal presentations to key staff;
- a certificated course in teaching basic skills — City and Guilds Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills.

The college has also been approached by ALBSU to pilot a course aimed at staff within industry and vocational staff within FE.

Progress

Because of the short length of the project, it was not possible to look at the effect of support on students' results. However, it is valid to assume that where there is progress in basic skills, there is progress toward NTETS.

North Lindsey College is to retest some students who have been receiving extra support, to estimate 'distance travelled'. During the project, 147 students who received basic skills support have demonstrated improved competence in those areas highlighted in their initial assessment.

Both colleges observed that identification of specific needs was assisted by the screening process but in addition more use of support workshop provision by other students was apparent. Students generally 'dropped in', particularly when assignments were due, having been alerted to the existence of such support at induction.

North Lindsey College reported evidence of learners who made use of the extra support services. This demonstrated that even in the case of learners with severe literacy problems co-operation between vocational and specialist staff, appropriately developed material and teaching methods and guidance which enables learners to switch from one learning opportunity to another when required, can bring about successful results in terms of achieving vocational qualifications.

Messages

Students requiring basic skills support need:

- assessment to measure their levels of basic skills;
- full pre-course information and guidance;
- individual learning needs identified in relation to their targets;
- access to sufficient good quality learning support;
- a realistic negotiated plan of action with timescales and arrangements for reviews;
- recognition of their specific learning difficulties and acknowledgement of these in the demands made on them;
- sufficient time to achieve targets;
- regular feedback on progress.

College managers need:

- to ensure that the college Mission Statement commits the college to offer education and training to all members of the community;
- reliable information about the volume and diversity of basic skills difficulties;
- information on the basic skills requirements of particular learning programmes and qualifications;
- a core of qualified learning support staff;
- a resource allocation to meet the demands for support;
- evidence of the effectiveness of learning support;
- to provide flexible programmes which allow students the additional time to achieve competence.

Vocational tutors need:

- a high level of awareness of the support needs of their students;
- guidelines for identifying students requiring basic skills support;
- information about what support is available to their students;
- to evaluate their existing methodology and resources and to liaise with the support specialists to develop more appropriate materials and methodologies.

Learning support specialists need:

- sound knowledge and training in working with adults and young people with learning difficulties;
- the tools for diagnosing specific difficulties in basic skills;
- evidence on which to base their support programmes and to estimate resources required;
- measurable attainment standards as a starting point for action;
- a broad skills base in this area of work;
- to work collaboratively with vocational staff;
- to employ a variety of methods of assessment and support;
- sufficient resources to provide support;
- skills in training other staff and acting as internal consultants;
- information on the basic skills requirements of all courses offered by the college;
- the support of the college management and of their colleagues in other areas of the curriculum.

SUPPORTING INDUSTRY

The Lifetime Learning Targets stress the importance of a continuing commitment to the training and development of the workforce. While employees need to increase their personal commitment to education and training, the achievement of these targets is, at least, equally the responsibility of employers. Colleges may provide a very wide range of opportunities for individual adult learners, but the targets cannot be achieved without commitment and action by employers.

Many colleges are being proactive in taking the targets message to industry, investigating the needs of, and offering appropriate support to, industry. In most cases, this relationship has existed for many years. Colleges have traditionally catered for local needs, including those of business. The case studies which follow indicate the potential for strengthening and further developing these relationships.

Investigating the training levels and needs of a specific industry

Hinckley College has a long history of working with the knitting and hosiery industry going back to 1931. The college is recognised nationally for the quality of its work in this field. It decided to undertake a current training needs analysis of the industry and to examine the relevance of the targets to it. The involvement of key individuals from the industry in helping to steer the research was seen as very important for its success. Therefore a small steering group was set up for this work and the college obtained information on skills shortages and training needs in the industry. This was followed by questionnaires and personal interviews to gather more detailed data specifically for this project. The former obtained responses from a cross-section of the industry and the latter enabled issues to be explored in greater depth. Thirty-two companies responded to the questionnaire and managers in a further 15 were visited and interviewed. All 15 had had previous contact and good relations with the college.

Given the limited nature of the survey it was essential to analyse responses in the context of the local industrial and economic situation using local labour market information. In the light of the rate of economic change, this data had to be very recent to be of value.

Patterns of training

Published data from previous research by other bodies suggests that over 70% (possibly as high as 80%) of Leicestershire textile companies had no training facilities of their own and that very few companies had a formal training policy. However, companies did use a wide range of training providers. Although lack of training was the most frequently cited barrier to recruitment, training did not figure at all among the actions to be taken to overcome recruitment difficulties. Skill shortages have long been identified at operative level. These shortages could reflect an unwillingness to enter unpopular employment rather than an absence of those skills. Some respondents had heard of National Training Targets; none was familiar with them.

Existing training was concentrated upon certain key activities:

- entry training at operative level;
- training a limited number of mechanics to NVQ level 2 or 3;
- some level 2 and a little level 3 training for administrative staff;
- in large companies, some level 4 or equivalent training of technologists and designers.

A great deal of the entry-level training is undertaken in-house and some of it is very short. There are differences between sectors of the industry. Hosiery, for example, has a great many jobs which are very limited indeed in their skill levels and in the range of application of those skills. New recruits may receive just one or two days' training before being considered ready for production work.

However, the interviews also provided evidence of operative-level workers who develop a considerable range of skills (i.e. multi-skilling) which are not necessarily associated with any formal training. Such multi-skilled employees may not receive any regrading or promotion as there may be little opportunity for these in the sort of company in which multi-skilling is of most importance.

The introduction of NVQs into the knitting and hosiery industry has been a slow process. It is not clear how much it is the result of, or how much it contributes to, the generally low level of training in the industry. Knitting-related NVQs are just becoming available, but none at level 3 were in place at the time of the research. The college has in the past concentrated upon mechanic and technician training, but anticipates that it will offer knitting-related NVQs at level 2 in 1995 and is examining the possibility of offering operative training. One of the purposes of this research was to examine the potential market for such provision. When assessing company trainers' awareness of NVQs and NTETs, the slow development and lack of availability of NVQs needs to be borne in mind.

Most respondents said that no employees had so far obtained NVQs. Not more than one per cent of employees of any company had an NVQ.

Some of the larger employers indicated that new employees were now going on to NVQ programmes. Respondents claimed that between 40% and 90% of their employees had skills equivalent to NVQ levels 1 and 2 (i.e. machinist skills).

Respondents expressed no dissatisfaction with the skill levels of their workforce.

Several respondents suggested that most employees at operative level have no desire to gain qualifications or to progress further up the career ladder. 'We have attempted to interest operatives [in] qualifications, but those that have been with us for years do not have the interest.'

It was sometimes stated, and often implied, that if employees did not possess the required skills they would no longer be working for the company. One interviewee and one questionnaire respondent felt that the opportunity to study might be of interest to some employees on the basis of personal development, but didn't feel that it would necessarily be of benefit to the company. One personnel officer indicated that it would be useful to enable employees to improve their skills and knowledge through additional study and training but was unsure whether management would endorse this view.

National Targets

The basic characteristic of the industry is that it has a large group of employees who are not expected to undertake more than routine production duties. Given the present level of technology, skills at level 1 and 2 are appropriate for these tasks. Companies do require higher level skills from managers, designers and maintenance staff (although smaller companies may buy in some of this expertise rather than providing their own).

All the evidence indicated that there is very little prospect of the knitting industry even approaching the qualification levels of the National Targets. Some respondents did foresee a gradual introduction of NVQs into employee training and suggested figures of five to fifteen per cent taking NVQs within the next few years. However, it seems most unlikely that a significant proportion of these will be at level 3 or above although there is an accepted need to train a small number of employees at these levels. They would be technicians, designers and managers.

According to the respondents, the fact that the targets will not be met in the industry does not mean that there is a skills gap. But there is some evidence that a possible skill shortage is looming.

'Existing employees possess the required skills. However the skills required are not available via the labour market for new recruits.'

Emerging findings

- For current production methods, respondents asserted that National Targets are inappropriate for this industry.
- For new entrants, Foundation Target 2 might come to be seen by the industry as a reasonable long-term target because multi-skilling is gradually being introduced, although this would not apply to the hosiery sector.
- Given the complexity of this industry it may be that a simple target or set of targets, even if industry specific, will not easily win general acceptance. Certainly the varieties of skill required in different sectors within the overall textile industry have caused problems in the development and spread of NVQs which are still unresolved.
- Automation in the industry has, so far, resulted in de-skilling. This has produced a small number of skilled technicians and a large number of operatives. Further automation might lead to higher skill requirements from a much smaller workforce. Alternatively, it might stimulate the continuing growth of very small firms where multi-skilled workers are essential because these firms are not large enough to justify the employment of significant numbers of specialist machinists.
- The college view is that on the basis of present production practices:

  — seventy-five per cent of employees might appropriately seek NVQ Levels 1-2 qualifications (with an increasing emphasis on Level 2 as multi-skilling spreads),

  — ten per cent of employees might be aim at NVQ level 3 and above,

  — some employees are undertaking work for which only level 1 is appropriate.
- There is a great deal of work to be done in raising awareness of new qualifications and of the targets.
- Smaller companies need to be assisted to find cost-effective ways of undertaking training which will not disrupt production.
- The way forward, to tackle the training needs of the industry, is likely to be the further development of a partnership between the Industrial Training Organisation for the industry (KLITRA), TECs that have a knitting and hosiery sector, manufacturing associations, trade unions and the two colleges which have expertise in this area.

The college role

By undertaking this research initiative the college has taken a lead which is likely to enhance its general credibility with the industry. The initiative has assisted the college to more clearly identify the needs of the industry which should help it to gain more training contracts.

The college has several possible roles:

- as a partner on the national scene, helping to stimulate an interest in training among employers and employees in the knitting industry. It could also help to stimulate interest in the industry on the part of those local and non-specialist organisations having a training responsibility;
- as a local training provider located in the area of greatest concentration of the industry. Here its work might encompass NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3;
- as a regional and national provider. This will involve bringing trainees into college for a limited period but also demands the flexibility to work extensively on employers' premises, which is already happening to a limited extent;
- as a researcher, continuing the work of this project more extensively and in greater depth. Feedback from the industry suggests that this is important work. However, the college feels that it may be more appropriate that it acts as a resource for such work rather continuing to instigate and manage it.

There is clearly an important question about the extent to which a college can act as a research body to identify industrial training performance and needs. In some ways, colleges are well placed to do so and market research in this area is important for college strategic planning. However, such work is very demanding of staff time and expertise and it is not clear how it can be resourced.

Messages

- National global targets don't necessarily help companies in an industry specific context.
- Beware replacing general national targets with general targets for a particular industry: different companies have different needs.
- The skills required by most employees in the knitting and hosiery industry tend to be at the less advanced end of the spectrum. The findings from this study may not apply to some other sectors of manufacturing. The sample for this project was small and therefore the data, although consistent across the respondents, should be treated with some caution and the conclusions regarded as tentative.
- Although there is an evident national need for higher skill levels, the current requirements of this industry are not congruent with the National Targets. Understandably, the priority of the industry will be its own needs rather than National Targets.
- Many TECs will have some companies in this industry in their area. However they will often be small and few in number. Therefore the TECs concerned will have to seek assistance from national organisations with a special interest in the industry if they are to help these companies. Information and awareness raising is required, together with very flexible forms of training, since releasing staff from production is often very difficult.
- This kind of investigation was widely welcomed in the industry since it was seen as work for the industry rather than being solely for the benefit of the college:

  — it was a valuable method of raising awareness of the Targets, NVQs and training opportunities;

  — it generated a series of contacts and relationships for the college within the industry and assisted the process of building partnerships;

  — it provided valuable market research data which will help to shape the college's product range;

  — it will serve as a model for investigating other areas of the colleges market and gave an impetus to the research aspect of college marketing.

Feasibility study — delivering training and development to a small firm

To examine the feasibility of supporting small firms in the attainment of Investors in People (IIP) status by providing tailor-made training and development programmes, Oxford College of Further Education decided to work with one company. The college already had a good record of providing such training in specific occupational areas, as well as a range of open learning programmes.

Over 75% of Oxfordshire businesses are very small. Since one of the key elements in the college's development strategy is 'providing a relevant and flexible service for employers', it was felt to be important to undertake some development work which explored techniques for working with small employers and also addressed the Lifetime Targets. A particular focus was helping a company to satisfy IIP criteria.

The Heart of England TEC Strategic Forum has developed its own additions to the National Targets including higher targets for Foundation 1 and 3. It has adopted Foundation 4 as a lifetime target and has agreed a further local lifetime target: 'By 2000, 35% of the workforce will be qualified to Level 4 or equivalent'.

The TEC has a good working relationship with the college and gave this initiative its full support. A small company was recommended by the TEC to be approached by the college: the company had already had its initial diagnosis and was keen to pursue IIP. However, the TEC wanted to ensure that any recommendations made to the company would include a wider perspective on training provision than just that available from the college.

Discussions with the managing director of the company established that the main requirement from his point of view was training for the small management team. He had already identified that on-the-job training would be required for most of the workforce in its specialist area. The project team identified a number of other services that the college might provide such as

training for staff in maintaining equipment and in customer contact skills. A training needs analysis was undertaken in the company by the college's management and professional services unit. At the time of the report work was continuing with the company to implement further training programmes for its 18 employees, to enable it to satisfy IIP requirements.

Outcomes

- A staff development plan for the company has been produced for both management and the rest of the workforce, making use of Management Charter Initiative (MCI) standards, to enable the company to gain the status of IIP.

- The college has since developed an improved system for responding to the training needs of small businesses which includes:

  — a nominated person in charge of services to business clients, in each college department;

  — staff development for these nominees in training needs analysis and in the college offer;

  — a system for recording company contacts and reporting this to the college marketing manager who will co-ordinate contacts with companies from more than one college department.

Messages

- It can be very beneficial for colleges to work closely with the IIP team at its local TEC. The colleges can help companies to implement their IIP action plans.
- TECs may look more favourably on colleges that can provide an impartial advisory service.
- IIP provides a business opportunity for colleges to provide tailor-made training and development programmes.
- Colleges need to have a co-ordinated response to small businesses, many of which have multi-disciplinary workforces which require individual training programmes.
- There are still companies whose workforces are so specialised that they are not covered by NVQs although all companies have generic roles , for example management, that fall within the NVQ framework.
- The best place to start to identify training needs is at management level. The identification of management training needs leads to the identification of the needs of the entire workforce because the training needs of the workforce must be related to business objectives.

Promoting NVQs to small- and medium-sized enterprises

Peterborough Regional College has also identified in its strategic plan the importance of delivering flexible programmes to employers. As in Oxfordshire, most companies in the area are small, with 80% of them employing 25 people or less. The college currently offers a number of training programmes to such companies, frequently establishing contact through the local small firms enterprise agency. The college runs, in partnership with this agency, a small firm's business club which offers small firms an opportunity to hear guest speakers and make their needs known to the college enterprise programme.

In order to tackle the Lifetime Targets, the proportion of companies offering their employees the opportunity to achieve NVQs must be dramatically increased. The college decided to work collaboratively with Greater Peterborough TEC to promote NVQs to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The TEC and the college have always enjoyed a good relationship and have worked closely together on YT, the long-term unemployed, the Gateway to Learning Scheme and NRA validation. Fundamental to this good relationship is the principal's membership (as in Oxford College) of the TEC's strategic forum.

Previous activities in the region identified a number of inhibiting factors in the promotion of NVQs to small businesses including:

- an absence of specialist personnel and training managers;
- being highly cost conscious;
- having very limited resources;
- having little or no time in which to train;
- being weary of yet more 'new initiatives'.

On the positive side:

- trainers deal with the decision maker;
- a quick response is possible;
- although often saturated with advice the entrepreneurial nature of the SME is such that ideas will be listened to.

College/TEC joint activity

The strategic forum has established a number of working groups covering HE, special needs, Foundation Targets and Lifetime Targets on which senior members of the college staff serve. This has led to a number of data gathering and promotional activities, including the following:

- as little hard data is available, a survey has been commissioned to obtain information on the extent to which local SMEs were training to NVQ standards or indeed were familiar with NVQs;
- a large local company, with excellent in-house training and assessment facilities, agreed to act as host to small firms in its sector wishing to view these facilities. These visits will also gain local press coverage which will help to spread the NVQ message. This model is being extended by using exemplar companies in other industrial sectors;
- many small firms can see the benefits of standards such as BS5750 and IIP. Therefore the marketing of training is to be 'piggybacked' onto the pursuit of these standards;
- IIP is being promoted through seminars, mail shots, the college small business club and through the Peterborough Enterprise Programme. Mail shots will use an excellent small firms database developed by the college, the TEC, chamber of trade and the small firms enterprise agency;
- as a practical mechanism for establishing and agreeing training needs the college and the TEC will use a job profiling and action planning scheme. The use of this scheme and periodic questionnaires and analysis will enable incremental improvements in lifetime training and development to be monitored;
- ten local industrial sectors have been identified and a series of awareness raising events/seminars are being held for employers organisations in each of these sectors and for the local branch of the Institute of Personnel Management;
- the college has established an information centre in the local city centre library where an adviser is available and NVQ/IIP material is prominently displayed. TEC and college staff will use mobile display facilities, produced by the TEC in local business parks to promote NVQs and publicise exemplar projects the SMEs.

Conclusion

These three case studies demonstrate that colleges can be innovative and proactive in their relationships with local industry and can provide information, research and consultancy skills of benefit to industry.

An unresolved issue is how such services might be resourced. SMEs have very small training budgets, although collaboration between groups of companies may help to spread the load. TECs may assist the development of such collaborative ventures but because of local competitiveness this may need to be on a wider basis, both regionally and nationally.

TECs also have a very valuable role in working with colleges in their efforts to provide services to industry. This can include the provision of local labour market information, the identification of companies that would benefit from college consultancy and training needs analysis (notably IIP candidates), and the joint promotion of NVQs.

However, the research also suggests that companies, in some industrial sectors at least, remain unconvinced that the Targets are relevant to them or that the bulk of their workforce requires a significant upgrading of their skills. There is a related issue about the value of NVQs to highly specific industries. Similarly, attitudes to training amongst many of those employed in such companies need to become more positive.

DEVELOPING SELF-RELIANCE, FLEXIBILITY AND BREADTH

Foundation Target Four — 'Education and training provision to develop self-reliance, flexibility and breadth' — is distinct from the other targets in that it does not refer to a particular qualification or level. The target refers very generally to qualities that all learning programmes should develop. However, it is also an important element of lifetime learning, since it refers to some of the personal qualities required by all learners to learn successfully. Lifetime Learning Targets could also usefully incorporate the further development of these qualities.

Because of the qualitative nature of this target it has been suggested that efforts to achieve it could be less than the targets which are quantifiable. However, if it is accepted that FT4 underpins the successful achievement of all the others, it follows that all provision should address it (indeed the frequent reference to this target by many of the colleges in this project underlines this). By doing so, it may become measurable.

Auditing the curriculum for breadth

Basford Hall College decided to develop an audit to evaluate the extent to which its present curriculum was already delivering FT4. Without such information, it would be very difficult to decide what action was required to meet the target. A neighbouring sixth-form college, Bilborough College, was invited to join the college in this task to obtain a wider perspective and to pool expertise.

The two colleges drafted an instrument to audit courses to determine the extent to which they may develop the requirements of FT4. The audit addressed the following issues:

- course aims and objectives — the extent to which these are made explicit to students with details of assessment procedures and coursework deadlines, opportunities for tutorials before, during and after coursework submission;
- learner agreements — if these are employed and whether they involve negotiation between staff and students;
- teaching strategies — opportunities for independent and collaborative learning, differentiation to allow for students' differing abilities;
- basic skills development — the extent to which numeracy, use of computers, communication skills are required;
- study skills — facilities and support offered;
- community work/work placement/independent projects — their place, value, and significance in the student's learning;
- records of achievement — how the current structure may be improved;
- careers guidance — links with employers, destinations of students after completion.

The audit also attempted to find out the extent to which the courses were thought to provide opportunities to develop self-reliance and flexibility and the main competences which were being developed.

The college drew upon material produced by the Policy Research Unit at Leeds Metropolitan University which, in collaboration with the Employment Department and Yorkshire and Humberside TECs, had produced some 'definitions' or 'interpretations' of FT4 and had made some suggestions for a methodology to measure the target.

The extent to which these definitions are shared is problematic. Colleges found that some tutors equate self-reliance with independent working, other tutors see group work as a vehicle for promoting flexibility in students, particularly where they are required to work with different

individuals when faced with new tasks. One tutor saw self-reliance and flexibility as related concepts and bound up with the nature of the discipline that students were studying and the work for which they were being trained.

Given these differences, it was nevertheless accepted that an examination of the extent to which current provision was promoting the development of flexibility, self-reliance and breadth would be useful. Opportunities to assess the breadth of course experiences and time to develop the knowledge base supporting related skills were seen as important. There was an implication that the student's personal circumstances need to be examined carefully to determine whether certain course regimes may be preventing rather than developing those very qualities aimed for in Foundation Target 4.

The colleges appointed the Partnership Learning Group at the University of Derby to undertake the pilot study and to conduct the audit of six courses across the two colleges. The aim of the pilot study was: 'to establish an appropriate methodology to undertake a more extensive survey into the nature and means of achievement of FT4, through the curriculum of the two colleges'.

Six courses were chosen, three from each college, which would enable direct comparisons to be made between the two colleges. These included:

	Basford Hall College	Bilborough College
	Vocational Skills Profiling Scheme	Pre-vocational Course
NVQ II	Childcare	NVQ II Accounts
GNVQ III	Business Studies	A-level Business Studies

The investigation took the form of exploratory interviews with all the tutors responsible for the selected courses and interviews with several randomly selected students from each of these courses. An interview schedule was used which was based upon the draft audit instrument produced by the colleges. This methodology enabled the intentions of the providers to be compared with the experiences of their students.

Findings

The pilot study found that the courses investigated did address most of the issues. Valuable profiles were produced of each course which revealed some factors that inhibited the development of opportunities to promote FT4. It was discovered, for example, that more work was needed on the development of learner agreements. The colleges are addressing these findings.

However, only full-time provision aimed at 16-19 year olds was investigated. A key finding of the survey was that 'time constraints and new syllabus demands had caused the teaching team to re-adopt direct teaching methods which made the student more dependent on the teacher ... resulting in a system which in itself has become inflexible and the student less, rather than more, self-reliant.' This may be even more evident in part-time provision.

The implications for the achievement of FT4 are, presumably, that while opportunities for developing self-reliance, flexibility and breadth are present all in learning programmes explicit attention to their development may fall victim to other, competing, demands.

As a result of the pilot, a questionnaire has been devised to gather information from staff. This could be adapted for use with students. The use of this questionnaire would give a picture of the extent to which the college as a whole is meeting the requirements of FT4 and would assist managers to identify any areas where action is required.

Messages

- Most education and training provision has the potential to develop self-reliance, flexibility and breadth. However, this potential must be identified and capitalised on.
- An audit of curriculum areas will identify the extent to which these qualities may be developed and highlight gaps.
- Part-time provision may need to draw more widely on the learner's experience outside formal classes to ensure that activities which may develop these qualities are identified and used.
- The development of self-reliance, flexibility and breadth is equally, if not more, important to the achievement of Lifetime Learning Targets than the achievement of Foundation Targets. Promotion of this target should therefore be as vigorous as all the others.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the work of colleges can and should contribute to the achievement of both national and local targets for education and training. Therefore, when colleges examine the ways in which their contribution can be enhanced, they should produce a wide-ranging agenda for action. This is reflected in the diversity of projects reported upon in this publication. Each college will have its own priorities which reflect its mission and local circumstances. However, the work reported upon here reflects development priorities in many colleges and should provide a valuable source of ideas for the sector.

Strategic implications

This project aimed to identify strategic implications of the target initiative for colleges. Listed below are the most significant strategic issues that were identified for colleges to address in their planning:

- Issues of retention and drop-out merit serious consideration by all colleges. The evidence suggests that college systems for recording, reporting, and following up students who may be at risk of leaving prematurely are often ineffective.

- Student tracking is an essential ingredient in monitoring progress and predicting drop-out or unsuccessful completion. MIS which are sufficiently robust to undertake this complex task are required as a matter of urgency.

- There is a significant proportion of young people who leave school unhappy with education and with society in general. Many of these young people are unemployed. Colleges should consider how to reach such students and help them to acquire the skills, self confidence and positive attitudes that will enable them to maximise opportunities for development and progression.

- The concept of 'careership' — providing progression through school, college, employment and university to the achievement of qualifications — is well worth exploring with local partners. A flexible system of units that can be credit accumulated may be an appropriate vehicle for this concept.

- Many adults are in low-skill, low-paid, often part-time occupations with few promotion opportunities. They may be vulnerable to redundancy and unemployment. They may lack the basic skills required to successfully complete education and training programmes. Though colleges are tackling the provision of basic skills support the problem of reaching people in this group remains. Employers must be encouraged to support staff development programmes for their workers, perhaps through collaborative marketing by TECs and their constituent colleges. Further outreach work in the community should be developed.

- The construction of a comprehensive educational guidance service, making use of diagnostic assessment where appropriate, has great benefits for both the learner and the college. This should be constructed collaboratively, to ensure impartiality and progression across providers and also to make best use of expensive resources.

- Many small companies lack training managers, staff development policies or programmes. Company managers may have little knowledge of training opportunities, qualifications and progression routes. Colleges may reach them and meet their needs by collaborating with the TEC and by using IIP.

- Colleges will work with small companies more effectively if they have a co-ordinated approach across the institution and invest in training for the college staff concerned. College management should evaluate the effectiveness of their services to small companies.

- Each locality can benefit from colleges working with the local TEC and other partners to increase the awareness of NVQs and Targets, particularly in industry. However, some companies might have a high awareness of NVQs and have still decided to reject them. Colleges and TECs should investigate these attitudes and make national bodies aware of them.

- There is some evidence that companies doubt how appropriate national, local or industry specific targets are for them. Colleges may be in a position to undertake research to investigate training needs and attitudes in selected industrial sectors in their local area — perhaps in co-operation with the local TEC.

- Foundation target four draws attention to qualities that all education and training programmes should aim to foster. Colleges need to establish the extent to which their existing programmes do so and the implications for lifetime learning.

Collaboration

Where success has been achieved in tackling these strategic issues it has often been by collaboration. The nature of these issues means that colleges will not be able to tackle them alone. Other research by FEU suggests that the more competitive environment created by incorporation does not preclude collaboration between colleges and a very wide range of organisations and agencies, to tackle specific issues. Indeed such activity is flourishing. Good examples of collaboration are illustrated in the case studies.

TECs and local authorities have the potential to play key roles in tackling the strategic issues that need to be addressed to reach targets. If they invite colleges to be full and close partners in this enterprise they will find that colleges have a great deal to offer.

Benefits to colleges

For colleges, the Targets can have three potential benefits:

- they can help to raise the profile of colleges with local organisations and lead to a fuller appreciation of their work;
- they can help to increase the awareness of new qualifications and other education and training initiatives among employers;
- they can stimulate further collaborative activity, perhaps through the local strategic forum.

FE's mission, which is largely shared by all those concerned with post-compulsory education and training, is to increase participation and improve achievement. National Targets can measure the extent to which this mission is realised. They cannot, in themselves, bring about improvement. However, they serve as valuable targets for those concerned with FE and training. The project has demonstrated the congruence between the mission and purpose of FE colleges and the Targets initiative and the vital part that the FE sector can play in the development of a culture of life-time learning. The review of the National Targets is presenting a valuable opportunity for those concerned with education and training to consider the relevance of the Targets and suggest additions and amendments.

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Kevin Donovan
Gordon Holding
Maria Hughes
Christopher Parkin

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Woolwich College

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APPENDIX A — NATIONAL TARGETS FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Foundation learning

1. By 1997, 80% of young people to reach NVQ III (or equivalent)
2. Training and education to NVQ III (or equivalent) available to all young people who can benefit
3. By 2000, 50% of young people to reach NVQ III (or equivalent)
4. Education and training provision to develop self-reliance, flexibility and breadth

Lifetime learning

1. By 1996, all employees should take part in training or development activities
2. By 1996, 50% of the workforce aiming for NVQs or units towards them
3. By 2000, 50% of the workforce qualified to at least NVQ III (or equivalent)
4. By 1996, 50% of medium to larger organisations to be Investors in People

APPENDIX B — AN UPDATED SET OF TARGETS

NACETT's outline proposals

The suggested format for the Council's proposed targets for the year 2000 is set out in the box below. The key points are as follows:

- the statement makes clear the purpose of the Targets;
- there is a clear distinction between measurable targets and broader aims;
- seven of the existing eight Targets are retained in essence, but with proposals for some modification or updating in all cases;
- the distinction between foundation and lifetime learning is retained;
- the terminology has been simplified and clarified where possible;
- the proposal envisages the inclusion of an additional target covering higher level skills, but no further new targets;
- there are five specific measurable targets.

The Council would welcome views on this proposed format, and on the coverage of the suggested updated targets.

National Targets for Education and Training

'Developing skills for a successful future'

To improve the international competitiveness of the UK by raising our standards of education and training to world class levels.

AIMS

- To ensure that all individuals realise their full potential, and all employers continuously update and develop the skills of all their employees;
- to ensure that all young people have access to educational opportunities, or to properly structured work-based training leading to NVQs, which best meet their aspirations and abilities;
- to ensure that all education and training effectively develops qualities of self reliance, flexibility and breadth.

TARGETS FOR 2000

Foundation learning

1. 85% of young people to achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A-C, an intermediate GNVQ, an NVQ 2 or vocational equivalent
2. [60-70%] of young people to achieve 2 GCE A levels, an Advanced GNVQ, an NVQ 3 or vocational equivalent

Lifetime learning

3. [60-70%] of the workforce to achieve at least 2 GCE A levels, an Advanced GNVQ, an NVQ 3 or vocational equivalent
4. [Target for higher level skills]
5. [Investors in People target]